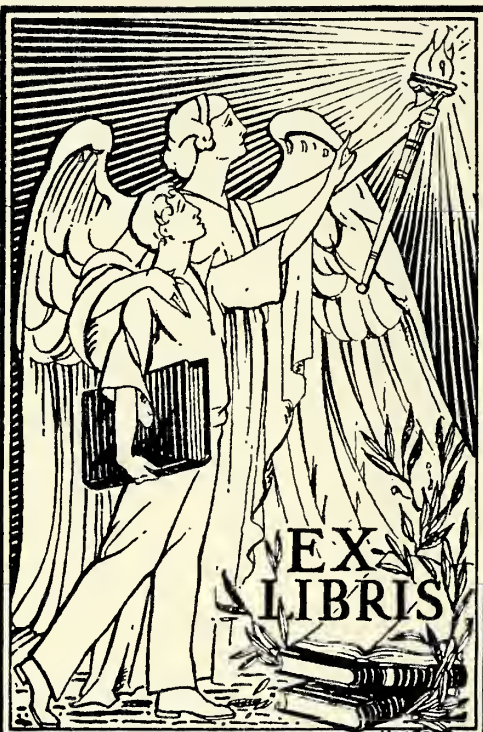


THE SEATTLE LIGHTHOUSE

FOR THE BLIND

By Don Donaldson

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The Seattle Lighthouse for the Blind  
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"You assigned to me no arduous task,  
I have not been employed by you.  
Yet when a favor I would ask  
You never fail to see me through.

With ready smile and willing feet  
You bring me books that I may read.  
Your social service is complete.  
It fills my recreation need.

Be it for musicale or play,  
You place the tickets in my hand.  
The proper words I cannot say  
To make the people understand.

Just what the Lighthouse means to me,  
I hope this verse helps to convey.  
It guides me on life's stormy sea,  
And turns my darkness into day."

-E. Sibyl Wood.

Written by a blind woman of Seattle, this poem is a sincere expression of the great services rendered by the Seattle Lighthouse for the Blind to those without sight residing in King County. It is a fitting tribute to a great institution doing a worthy and unique work.

Started over eighteen years ago by a group of philanthropically-minded people of Seattle who sought to help the blind to help themselves, the Lighthouse has grown steadily until now over one hundred and fifty people are aided by its beneficent influence. Like the naval lighthouse directly across the bay which sends its beams far into the night to guide passing ships, the Lighthouse for the Blind fulfills its mission by lighting the darkness and helping those who would be hopelessly adrift without its contact.

### History

The Lighthouse for the Blind was organized in 1916, the outgrowth of the Seattle Association for the Blind, an organization which had started in 1915 through the efforts of Dr. and Mrs. Frederick Bentley, Mr. John P. Hartman and a group of representative Seattle people.

In November, 1916, a small workshop was opened in the Metropolitan Building Company area, where basketry and hand weaving of table mats were taught to several blind persons. Later, upon the purchasing of a table and vise and the donation to the Lighthouse of a rug loom, chair caning and rug weaving were added to the occupations of the shop. For two years this





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<https://archive.org/details/seattlelighthouse00dond>

work progressed, employing only a few men. Expansion was needed to make possible employment of more blind people. Accordingly, the Lighthouse purchased in 1918 a broom factory which was in running condition, and on April 2nd of the same year was incorporated in compliance with the laws of the State of Washington.

The present building, located at 131 Elliott Avenue West, Seattle, and containing all departments and the office of the organization, was formally opened in May, 1925, the gift of many firms and individuals. An attractive, one-story, cement structure, it maintains a commanding position on the shore of Elliott Bay amid the teeming activity of Seattle's waterfront. The main floor contains a large room where the brooms are made, a drying room, a shipping room, and a miscellaneous room where rugs, brushes and mops are manufactured and where caning is done. A full cement basement houses several carloads of broomcorn and other supplies

The present number of Lighthouse employees in the factory is twenty; in addition to this number, eleven salesmen and four workers in the welfare department are employed, making a total of thirty-five blind and partially seeing persons benefitting by employment at the Lighthouse. For the year 1934, 4,367 days of work was provided in the factory. From a financial point of view, the year 1934 was the best the Lighthouse has had for a very long time, with no deficit. This has been possible through a lower wage than formerly.

The financial support of the Lighthouse during the year ending September 30, 1933, was derived from the following sources: An allotment from the Seattle Community Fund of \$4,573, which was 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ % of the total income; an appropriation from King County of \$3,600, which has been discontinued, but which comprised 8.9% of the total income for the previous year; membership dues and direct gifts, amounting to 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ % of the total; and receipts from the sale of products made by the blind, constitution 75.9% of the total income. It is interesting to not that \$8,922 was received from public support during the fiscal year 1933; yet \$16,895 was paid directly to the blind in wages. In other words, from the one dollar the Lighthouse receives as a donation it is possible through the manufacture and sale of its products to pay two dollars in wages, thus doubling its donations.<sup>1</sup>

### Activities

Basketry: Together with hand weaving of table mats, basketry was the first activity of the Lighthouse, and for years employed several workers. It has been discontinued as a general occupation, but attention is still given to special orders, and also to repairing reed baskets and furniture. This last, the repairing, is a paying aspect of basketry, and the shop is endeavoring to build up this trade.

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<sup>1</sup>. The Seattle Times, Dec. 24, 1933.





Broom making and marketing: This branch of work was started in 1918 with the purchase of a factory already in operating condition. Seven men were employed in the department during its early stage; but the shop has expanded, and there has been installed some power machinery, such as a winder, a sewing machine and a machine to assist in the sorting of corn. The broom shop has operated rather steadily throughout the depression, though working days per week have been lessened, and wages reduced somewhat. The following table gives the average number of workers employed in the shop per month, most of whom work in the broom department:

<u>Fiscal year from</u>		<u>Number employed</u>
10-1-25	<u>to</u> 9-30-26	18
10-1-26	9-30-27	19
10-1-27	9-30-28	19
10-1-28	9-30-29	23
10-1-29	9-30-30	25
10-1-30	9-30-31	28
10-1-31	9-30-32	30
10-1-32	9-30-33	18
10-1-33	9-30-34	16

Marketing of the brooms is done in two ways -- house-to-house retailing by blind or partially blind salesmen, and wholesaling direct to jobbers and merchants. House-to-house selling of brooms, if done by alert salesmen, is lucrative; in two instances it has enabled university students to earn their way through college; other blind men have supported their families by this means. There are ten such salesmen at the present time, each having his own assigned territory in Seattle or its vicinity. Relatively little is done to stimulate retail trade outside of Seattle, but during the summer months of 1934 two representatives from the Lighthouse circled the State of Washington in a sales campaign and sold nearly a thousand dollars worth of merchandise; the success of this venture proves the need for penetration into a wider retail field.

Wholesaling is carried out by a blind man, who, with the assistance of his guide, covers the western portion of the state. In the fall of 1934 it was noticed by the Lighthouse officials that this salesman was not getting all the business they felt could be obtained in such a vast territory. Accordingly, the wholesaling was divided, allowing a partially seeing young man and a partner to take over half the district. But the time for this drastic step was ill-chosen. The division of territory together with a sharp falling-off in sales due to several price raises of the season minimized the profit of each salesman. Although many new customers were obtained, the increase in business was not sufficient to cover the increased cost of salesmen's remuneration and expenses. Therefore it became necessary to return, temporarily at least, to the old set-up of one salesman and a guide. In spite of the troubles that have arisen from time to time in wholesaling, a considerable volume



of business is maintained, and the Lighthouse sells its brooms to a number of large jobbers and small retailers.

Miscellaneous industrial activity: This includes chair caning, rug weaving, and brush and mop making. Chair caning and rug weaving were started soon after the shop was organized and are still continued. The Lighthouse has a monopoly, literally speaking, on chair caning in Seattle; occasionally chairs are sent in from remote points as Everett and Tacoma to be reseated. Rugs woven by the blind are marketed in Alaska and sold through several of the better department stores in Seattle. Brush making is a new activity, having been started in 1931. The manufacturing of wet and dry mops is even more recent. All of these miscellaneous industrial occupations are well suited to persons who have lost their eyesight fairly late in life.. Since blindness generally occurs late in life, these occupations fulfill a very great need in the realization of the objective of the Lighthouse, namely, to help the blind to help themselves. The department has always remained small, due largely to the marketable limitations of the articles produced; but it is quite possible that there will be an expansion of the department in the near future, particularly if the manufacture of furniture especially adapted to those without sight is introduced, an art which is being successfully developed by the male pupils at the Washington State School for the Blind. The ensuing table gives the number employed in the chair caning, rug weaving, and brush and mop making department for the past several years:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number</u>
1927 . . . . .	4
1928 . . . . .	5
1929 . . . . .	6
1930 . . . . .	5
1931 . . . . .	5
1932 . . . . .	7
1933 . . . . .	3
1934 . . . . .	4

Service and Welfare Work: This falls logically under three divisions -- transcribing, home teaching, and welfare work.

The transcribing of books into braille by hand was started in Seattle in 1922 by women who were interested and wished to donate their services; members of the Junior League were among the first volunteers, and they have carried on the work ever since. At the beginning of this enterprise, materials were purchased by the transcribers, with the cost of a proof-reader resting upon them. But very soon the Lighthouse undertook the furnishing of materials and some of the salary of the proof-reader. The Lighthouse now bears the full expense. It employs a blind college graduate, Mr. George Bailey, as proof-reader, who works in conjunction with the department for the blind of the Seattle Public Library. The books transcribed, which are still done entirely by volunteers (mostly by Junior Leagers) are those not





embossed by any of the braille presses. These books are given to the braille division of the Seattle Public Library, and are sent without charge to any blind person in the United States.

Home teaching is done by two women, Mrs. C. D. Bailey (seeing) and Miss Dorothy Legg (partially seeing). Mrs. Bailey gives private instruction on the reading and writing of braille, reading of Moon type, typewriting, as well as guidance in academic work. The following table shows the number of lessons she has given for each of nine consecutive years:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Lessons</u>
1925-26 . . . . .	273
1926-27 . . . . .	263
1927-28 . . . . .	241
1928-29 . . . . .	209
1929-30 . . . . .	239
1930-31 . . . . .	213
1931-32 . . . . .	209
1932-33 . . . . .	283
1933-34 . . . . .	232

Miss Legg is the instructor in household art work, which consists largely in the supervision of hemming of tea towels, dust cloths and guest towels by blind women in their own homes. This branch of home teaching has suffered greatly from the depression, and for a long time was discontinued.

A unique service of the Lighthouse, said to be the only one of its kind, is that rendered by its welfare visitor, Mr. Oscar Mortenson, who himself is partially blind. Mr. Mortenson's assistance is available to anyone in Seattle with defective vision. He sees that the type-writers owned by those on his calling list are kept in repair; that proper medical and dental attention is secured; that the wants of the destitute blind are supplied, such as obtaining food and clothing. He acts as guide, meets sightless persons at trains, supplies canes, takes books to and from the library. Chief among his varied duties is the administration of comfort and understanding counsel to those recently afflicted with blindness. "When, during the first months of lost vision, the sufferers feel that they are indeed shipwrecked, that there is for them no lighthouse nor any port -- nothing but an all engulfing sea of despair -- it is the welfare visitor who shows them where to look for the light, for a port and for hope."<sup>1</sup> Many things that make life easier for the blind are made possible through the activities of the welfare visitor; through him, the Lighthouse reaches into the homes of the blind, carrying comfort and good cheer to the sick and discouraged. On the following page is a table showing the number of visits made by the welfare visitor over a period of nine years:

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1. The Seattle Star, Sep. 26, 1923.



<u>Fiscal year</u>	<u>Total no. visits</u>
1925-26 . . . . .	506
1926-27 . . . . .	686
1927-28 . . . . .	673
1928-29 . . . . .	694
1929-30 . . . . .	1257
1930-31 . . . . .	1590
1931-32 . . . . .	1716
1932-33 . . . . .	1781
1933-34 . . . . .	1445

Additional services: The Lighthouse is of service to the blind in other ways. It keeps on hand slates, styli, braille paper, checkers, dominoes, and playing cards specially designed for those without sight, which are sold at cost. Tobacco and candy bars are sold wholesale to the men in the factory, and canes are distributed free.

Entertainments of a wide variety are arranged for the blind by the Lighthouse. Tickets for choice musical and dramatic programs are distributed; reading circles are held periodically; dances for the blind and their friends are given at least twice a year; once each summer a picnic is held; at Thanksgiving a turkey dinner is given to all of Seattle's blind citizens. This event, having been continued for thirty-four consecutive years, has an interesting history. The annual Thanksgiving dinner was first held when Paul Singerman, a prominent Seattle business man, returned to his birthplace in Europe in 1901 and found that his aged mother, whom he had believed was totally blind, could still recognize him. Mr. Singerman was so overjoyed that he cabled his son in Seattle to provide a Thanksgiving dinner for every blind person in the city. After his death the family continued the custom until 1924. In 1924 Mr. Ives, himself blind, and true friend of the Lighthouse, was host at the annual dinner. In accordance with his wish, and in his memory the Ives family has continued the custom.<sup>1</sup>

Realizing that the public must be educated to the achievements of the blind before any constructive work of the visually handicapped really can succeed, the Lighthouse has launched a definite publicity program which aims to dispel false ideas and prejudices, and to introduce true and proper understanding on the part of the seeing. The public, its trustees rightly believe, must be taught that the blind are something more than a "social emotion". Consequently, the Lighthouse, through arrangement with several of Seattle's largest department stores, gives frequent demonstrations in which men from the shop exhibit in show windows their ability to make brooms and cane chairs. A similar demonstration is held annually at the Western Washington Fair, where the Lighthouse maintains a booth. Since January, 1931, when Mrs. Ida Hirst-Gifford, field representative of the American Foundation for the Blind, visited the Pacific Northwest, the Lighthouse has sponsored, with the help of the local Lion's Club, the Council of Jewish Women, the Junior League, and students

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<sup>1</sup>. The Seattle Times, Nov. 22, 1934.





from the State School for the Blind, what is called "Seattle Educational Week for the Blind". During the week numerous demonstrations of trades and crafts of blind folk are given, along with radio programs and speeches and much publicity in local newspapers. For financial reasons the Lighthouse has not published much literature -- only two single-page pamphlets in four years. Nevertheless, the work of the institution is widely known in Seattle, Tacoma and Everett. The frequent house-to-house calls of salesmen and the slogan on all products "Look for the Lighthouse label" undoubtedly have been great factors in spreading its name.

### Conclusion

From time to time the Lighthouse has been severely criticized by rival organizations. In years past an organization known as the "Brotherhood for the Blind" -- now out of existence -- spread without success malicious propaganda which aimed to destroy the Lighthouse; the Washington Protective Association for the Blind, recently founded, has taken up the battle with increased vigor. The sum total of the accusations of these emulous groups resolves itself to: The Lighthouse does not take care of the needs of all the blind. And this is true, for only a small fraction of Seattle's blind are employed.

But that the Lighthouse is doing its best under the circumstances cannot be denied. It gives employment to as many blind as it can, is a Union shop and a member of the NRA. Its home teaching and welfare departments are available to all. Its entertainments are free and the concert and theatrical tickets it secures are distributed without discrimination. There are also these things to be said in its favor: The people promoting the Lighthouse are among the ranks of Seattle's finest citizens. The factory is not guided by the profit motive; its sole purpose is to help the blind cope with their environment. And lastly, the Lighthouse has continued operation for eighteen years, which is many times the life span of such sheltered shops.

The Lighthouse does not employ more blind for the reason that it lacks money to do so. Like other similar workshops, an augmentation is necessary to compensate for blindness and to make up the difference between the earning power of the blind and the seeing worker; this comes from the Seattle Community Chest Fund. Being a private institution and relying on local public charity for its subsidy, the scope of the Lighthouse is necessarily limited. Could it obtain a regular bounty from either the state or the county and city, it would be able to increase its employment. With a sufficient subsidy from the state,<sup>1</sup>

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1. A state subsidy would not be out of place, for, since there is no state commission for the blind, the Lighthouse logically is the established and proven institution to handle the needs of those without sight. Supervision by the State Board of Control, or any other appropriate state agency, would insure the right usage of such public funds.



the Lighthouse could become state-wide in its functions, drawing blind workers from all sections, could solicit and fulfill much larger orders, handle a greater number of lines, improve its administration and efficiency, and increase the pay of workers.

But until greater financial aid is granted, the Lighthouse must go on as it has in the past, helping as many as it can within the means of its limited resources. It must continue to ignore the slanderous accusations of the Washington Protective Association for the Blind, or like organizations, which aim at destruction. It must strive for efficiency, operating on business principles in so far as wages, production and selling are concerned. Particularly should its wholesaling activities be improved. The hiring of a capable sighted salesman to handle the wholesale trade might measurably increase the present volume of business, and thus further employment of more blind. Wholesaling should not be confined to only the western portion of the state, but should be extended into Eastern Washington and Idaho. To open a sales-room in downtown Seattle, preferably in the public market where rent is cheap and where the greatest number of people congregate, might prove lucrative; but should this tend to lessen house-to-house sales, the enterprise ought to be discontinued. To meet the demands of a changing market should always be uppermost in the minds of those in charge; production of new articles from time to time should be tried, and a departure away from any one of the few stereotype lines indigenous to workshops for the blind ought not be regarded with misgivings. For it is only by being progressive and by following business principles that the Lighthouse may fully succeed in continuing to help the blind help themselves.

Perkins Institution  
April 1, 1935





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